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FOR WHA/CAN, EB/TRA, AND CA/PPT

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [ECON](#) [KHLs](#) [EAIR](#) [ASEC](#) [CPAS](#) [CA](#)

SUBJECT: IMPLEMENTATION OF WHTI AIR RULE: CANADA IS MOSTLY
READY

REF: A) STATE 7396 B) TORONTO 00022

SENSITIVE BUT UNCLASSIFIED--PLEASE PROTECT ACCORDINGLY.

¶1. (SBU) Summary: The general view of Mission Canada, from Nova Scotia to British Columbia, is that the January 23 implementation of the Western Hemisphere Travel Initiative (WHTI) passport requirement will take place with little disruption to air travel from Canada to the United States. Under the new WHTI requirement, all travelers, U.S. citizens included, entering the United States by air must present a valid passport as their travel document. A reasonable phased-in implementation plan will allow legitimate travelers who lack a passport to still enter the United States for a limited time. The only snag in smooth implementation might occur where air carrier station managers at Canadian airports choose to not issue boarding passes to passengers without passports unless specifically instructed to do so by their headquarters.

¶2. (SBU) Summary continued: Mission Canada posts have conducted considerable outreach to ensure that the Government of Canada (GOC), airlines flying from Canada to the U.S., and American and Canadian citizens--the traveling public--are aware of this new passport requirement. At the eight major Canadian airports served by U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) preclearance facilities, transitional procedures are in place to allow travelers to make their flights to the U.S. with alternate documents if they have not yet obtained a passport. This will be a limited grace period, however. At Canadian airports without U.S. preclearance facilities, we have made an effort to inform carriers of the transitional plan and its policy that they will not be fined, at the present time, for boarding passengers on U.S.-bound flights who do not have passports. A special provision of the U.S. passport requirement was announced to ensure the return to Canada of the tens of thousands of "snowbirds" who spend winter months in southern climes. Interestingly, it appears that the GOC has done less to prepare its citizens for the passport requirement than the United States, with long wait times and application backlogs reported at Canadian Passport Offices. End summary.

Getting the word out

¶3. (SBU) There has been a Mission-wide effort to educate and inform Government of Canada (GOC) officials about the new rule for air travel from Canada to the United States. (Comment: The GOC "gets it" regarding the air rule, at last, though there is still an effort underway in the GOC to find a

special exemption for Canadians crossing the land border when that rule goes into effect in 2008. End comment.) From the Ambassador to first-tour officers, we have taken every opportunity during speaking engagements (at Rotary Clubs, chambers of commerce, travel associations, business groups), through the media (television, radio, journalists' roundtables, op-ed pieces), and using other electronic mediums (consular section voice mail messages, Mission Canada websites, our newsletters to American communities) to make sure the message has been delivered. Printed notices of the new rule were made available to every American calling at Mission Canada consular offices. Prominent posters in waiting rooms advertised the passport rule, and Consular Officers patiently explained it when asked.

14. (SBU) Mission Canada also contributed to GOC and Canadian Q4. (SBU) Mission Canada also contributed to GOC and Canadian airport authorities' efforts over the past three months to use posters and billboards to advise travelers of the need to get a passport for air travel to the U.S. after January 23. CBP has been distributing handouts and has visuals advertising the requirement at all of its preclearance facilities. Since the start of the new year, national print media across Canada carried GOC ads, either one-fourth or one-half page, carrying the same message. In addition, GOC officials have been quoted in numerous articles on WHTI, or on Canadian efforts to produce passports and meet the increased demand as a result of WHTI. GOC websites (Foreign Affairs, Canada Border Services Agency, Public Safety, etc.) carry extensive information on the subject. Minister of Public Safety Stockwell Day has been prominent among the GOC ministers holding media encounters to discuss the implementation of WHTI and Canadian preparations to do so. He has consistently supported the changes in air regulations as reasonable. (Comment: Minister Day's message is somewhat

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mixed, however, in that he continues to voice concern over the negative effects on trade and travel that the land and sea rules will have when they are put in place in 2008. End comment.)

The message has been delivered

15. (U) Mission Canada officers have conducted interviews and site visits with U.S. and Canadian authorities at all major (and several minor) airports across Canada to gauge the preparedness of government and airline officials for implementation of the WHTI passport requirement for air travel on January 23. (Comment: We also hope to have personnel present at the major airports on January 23 to observe the start of implementation. End comment.) The view from across Canada:

16. (U) The 11-member Atlantic Canada Airport Authority has gotten the word out to all its members about the WHTI requirement. Even though some of the airports who belong to the Authority do not have direct flights to the U.S., they now advise intending passengers who may be connecting to onward U.S. flights about the passport rule. Halifax, the busiest of Nova Scotia's airports, has been advertising the need for U.S.-bound passengers to get a passport since the CBP preclearance facility opened in October 2006. The Halifax airport website has a scrolling banner advising air travelers of the need to have a passport for travel to the U.S. after January 23. The CBP Port Director estimates that over 90 percent of the passengers coming through preclearance are already using passports.

17. (U) A survey in September 2006 in Quebec indicated that even at the land border crossing of Jackman/Armstrong, nearly half of the travelers were presenting passports as proof of citizenship. U.S. officials at Quebec border crossings and Amconsul Quebec City officers have been urging travelers to

obtain passports.

¶8. (U) In Montreal the airport authority and CBP have advertised the passport requirement for months. Visits to Montreal by Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and State Department officers handling passports and other travel programs afforded an opportunity to get the message on WHTI out to a number of influential audiences and journalists. All posts have used visits by USG officials working on WHTI to convene government and media representatives. Posts have also been effective at using large conferences (Business Trade Alliance, Pacific Northwest Economic Region, etc.) as appropriate fora to discuss WHTI. (Note: Mission Canada wishes to add a special note of appreciation to DAS Frank Moss of CA, who spent many days in Canada over the past year helping us get the message out. End note.)

¶9. (SBU) Far western Canadians appear to be prepared for implementation of the air rule. Vancouver's air travelers, already a pretty sophisticated group, are getting their Canadian passports despite four-hour line ups to make an application. Vancouver International Airport's CBP facility does not anticipate problems. The four airports in the Calgary consular district with regularly scheduled flights to the U.S. were for the most part uninformed regarding the transitional plan until Amconsul Calgary officers shared copies of it with them on January 19, but all of them thought that the overall WHTI passport rule for air travel had been adequately publicized. (Comment: Some airline personnel in Qadequately publicized. (Comment: Some airline personnel in Alberta and elsewhere seem uncertain as to how much flexibility there is in implementing the regulations, however. See para. 12 below. End Comment.)

¶10. (U) In Ottawa, the Air Transport Association of Canada (ATAC) expressed its confidence that air travelers heading south would experience no major problems on January 23. ATAC and its membership have been proactive since the WHTI rule was finalized in advising clients to get passports. On January 19, ATAC forwarded to all its members, which include most Canadian commercial carriers, the DHS transitional enforcement plan that DHS had provided to air carriers in Washington on January 18 (see para. 13 below), noting that it was an internal document only and not for distribution to the general public. ATAC members view the passport requirement favorably since it reduces the non-standard and questionable forms of passenger documents that airlines sometimes have to deal with. ATAC believes that air travelers are adequately

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informed of the passport rule. On January 19, the Embassy also contacted the headquarters of Air Canada, which said that it had transmitted the text of the transitional plan to all of its station managers in Canada with instructions that they should process passengers according to the DHS plan. Also on January 19, the CBP Port Director at the Ottawa preclearance facility met with carriers and provided information on the transitional plan.

Snowbirds addressed

¶11. (U) After meeting with Canada's Minister of Public Safety Stockwell Day in Washington on January 18, DHS Secretary Michael Chertoff said that DHS would accommodate

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the many Canadians who take up winter residence in the southern United States, or who fly to Mexico and the Caribbean on flights that land in the United States. Chertoff said that DHS will "allow them to depart the United States without a passport - for some significant period of time - to avoid the problem of people who might have come last year before the (WHTI) requirement." The DHS decision will allow the current flock of snowbirds to return to Canada

without passports.

Possible pitfall avoided--maybe

¶12. (SBU) In calls last week on CBP preclearance officers, Pearson Airport officials, and airlines serving Pearson, Amconsul Toronto officers discovered that information about how to handle passengers without passports had not been passed from airline headquarters in the U.S. to their offices in Toronto. Air carriers had been briefed last week in Washington by DHS and State on transitional procedures that CBP would use on January 23 to allow passengers without passports to board aircraft for the U.S. In discussing how to handle passengers without passports, Toronto carriers were confused about whether passengers without passports could be boarded or not. One U.S. carrier operating out of Toronto said that its instructions from headquarters were that its personnel should deny boarding passes to any passengers without passports. That statement indicated that information from the briefing in Washington had not been passed to Toronto. On January 22 Toronto also contacted one of Ontario's regional jet operators that flies out of three non-preclearance airports to the U.S. That carrier had not heard of the phase in of WHTI implementation and was planning to deny boarding to passengers without passports. (Note: A U.S. carrier operating out of Saskatoon said that it, too, had been instructed by headquarters that passengers without passports should not be allowed to board. End note.)

¶13. (SBU) Amconsul Toronto requested clarification from Washington. Once alerted to this seeming breakdown in communication between carriers' headquarters and their Canadian airport station offices, DHS issued a "WHTI Public Version of Enforcement Plan" for dissemination to all airlines. The document, which is for internal airline use only, outlines the phased implementation plan with which DHS proposes to address the problem of air travelers who do not have a passport after January 23. This plan will "solicit compliance while minimizing the possible adverse impact on carriers and the traveling public." Basically, it offers the assurance that during the transitional phase of WHTI implementation, travelers who are otherwise qualified for Qimplementation, travelers who are otherwise qualified for admission to the U.S. may be boarded without a passport. Passengers who travel without a passport will be entered into the DHS data base and admonished to get a passport. Penalties will not be initiated against carriers who board passengers who lack a passport.

The Wild Card

¶14. (U) On Friday afternoon, Amconsul Winnipeg alerted us to another possible problem with smooth implementation of the WHTI passport rule, despite the reasonable plan for a phased-in implementation devised by DHS. Staff working for at least one carrier in Winnipeg indicated that they would not board any passengers without a passport--no exceptions. On January 19, Amconsul Calgary reported that the notice of the implementation plan and grace period for the passport

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requirement may not have reached the carriers at Edmonton, Calgary, Regina, and Saskatoon airports; some carriers had indicated that they intended to turn away passengers without passports. Calgary officers distributed copies of the implementation plan.

¶15. (SBU) Also on January 19, Amconsul Quebec City officers delivered copies of the DHS transitional plan to airlines handling regularly scheduled flights to the U.S. from Jean Lesage Airport. Most of the airline representatives indicated this was the first time that they had seen the DHS

guidance on phased implementation. Airline staff choosing to follow strict chain of command procedures may decide to not board passengers without passports until they receive an internal instruction that they do so. So, unless headquarters send specific directives, it looks like passengers without passports could be denied boarding in some Canadian airports. (Comment: one would expect that denial of boarding would not occur for long, however, as the airlines losing passengers would see the competition--airlines that do board them--picking up all the business. If some carriers operate using the DHS phased implementation plan, we expect that all carriers will quickly fall in line for fear of losing passengers. End comment.)

Americans ready for the passport rule--What about Canadians?

¶16. (SBU) The effort to promote passports has been a huge success among Americans. There are an estimated 72 million Americans with passports at present. There has been a significant increase in applications as WHTI implementation approaches. The U.S. is currently issuing about 325,000 passports per week. By contrast, Canada seems ill prepared to meet the rapidly increasing demands of Canadians for passports. GOC sources allow as how there is presently a backlog of over 100,000 applications for Canadian passports--which will require 11-12 weeks to clear. Wait times in Vancouver and Ottawa Canada Passport Offices routinely run to three hours currently.

¶17. (U) Comment: With possible exceptions where carrier station managers have not received instructions from headquarters, it appears that implementation of the WHTI passport requirement for air travel will proceed smoothly on January 23. We will have our eyes in the field to record developments--stay tuned. Thanks to all constituent posts for both their efforts to inform about WHTI and their reporting on preparedness for WHTI in their consular districts. A special thanks to Amconsul Toronto for raising the alarm when you discovered that the Washington briefing on phased-in implementation had not been passed on to all those in Canada with a need to know.

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